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ALBANIA: The Knives

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[Summary of Neshat Tozaj's book *Thikat* [The Knives]. Publisher: Naim Frasheri Publishing House. Editor: Fatos Kongoli. Reviewers: Dritero Agolli, Ismail Kadare, and Nasi Lera]

[Text] Neshat Tozaj, the author, was born in Kallarat, Vlore, in 1943. He obtained his law degree from the Political and Legal Sciences Faculty. He is employed at the propaganda sector of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. His first book was published in 1972. Many of his books have been made into movies. [List of his books and the titles of the movies are given; not reproduced here.]

Dear Reader,

The novel *Thikat* [The Knives] takes its theme from the party's and Comrade Enver Hoxha's struggle against the hostile activities of the polyagent Mehmet Shehu and other members of his counterrevolutionary organization. It is not the intent of the novel to discuss the plot [of the enemies]. The aims, methods, forms, resources, and connections of the plot were uncovered by the party and Comrade Enver Hoxha.

Literature, however, sets the events on the level of the spirit; it looks at how they strike at man's spirit, at the good and the bad fortune in his life, and at the reactions that result. The novel *The Knives*, therefore, takes a simple incident that occurred at the time of the plotters' actions and exposes their hostile activity.

In writing about problems in one specific area, I aim to stress that this is an artistic work, and any resemblance to real persons is coincidental.

—The Author

The Knives

Members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs met to discuss a situation described as a "serious problem affecting Albania's relations with other foreign governments." Among those in attendance were Astrit Murrizi, chief of the Technical Sector, Robert Petroja, a Sigurimi official, and Ilmi Gjura, director of Investigations. The tires of a car belonging to a foreign embassy had been punctured. The minister of internal affairs regarded the incident as the actions of a subversive group and demanded quick action to find the culprits. In response to the minister's request Ilmi Gjura decided first to prove the existence of a subversive group and then to find its connection with foreign agencies.

Minush, an emotionally unstable young woman, had punctured the tires as revenge against a foreigner who had struck her motorcycle. Determined, however, to prove that a subversive group was involved, Investigations and Sigurimi officials arranged, with the minister's

approval, to have documentation falsified. Minush was arrested as well as two young factory workers, Elizabeth and Edi, who had innocently provided the knife for Minush. In addition, Elizabeth's family was interned.

Astrit Murrizi, convinced of their innocence and knowing that evidence had been falsified, persisted in his efforts to clear them. Eventually he sent a report to the party on the devious role on the part of the minister and Investigations and Sigurimi officials. The party investigated Astrit's accusations and Elizabeth was declared innocent and she and her family were released.

Chapter 1

A meeting was held in the office of the deputy minister of internal affairs where attendees including Astrit Murrizi, chief of the Technical Sector, Robert Petroja, a Sigurimi official, and Ilmi Gjura, director of Investigations, were informed of a serious development: Unknown persons have punctured the tires of foreign embassy cars. Investigations workers are doing their job, the deputy minister tells them, but you also, turning to Robert Petroja, "must take careful action and coordinate your actions with the Tirana Directorate." He remarks that this situation "has placed us, and above all, our country in a difficult position...because it affects our relations with other governments."

Robert Petroja, known by all as a favorite in the Ministry of Interior, spoke rarely, but on this occasion, responding to Ilmi Gjura, he spoke out about the need to uncover this enemy action. "He wanted to show the Sigurimi's superiority over Investigations. According to Petroja and his colleagues, the Investigations Department was nothing more than a club in the hands of the Sigurimi."

Ilmi Gjura announced that "as soon as we find a thread we will beat them." Murrizi shivered. Recently he had often been hearing the words "beating and arrests." These seemed to him to be a galloping revival of an old illness. Astrit had been noting more and more Robert's two-faced character: He smiled at the minister, while toward his subordinates he acted like a "rooster."

When Astrit arrived at the scene of the crime, he was told that clear fingerprints had been found. Astrit informed the deputy minister and then headed for home feeling a great sadness despite the preparations he saw all around him for the 1980 New Year's festivities.

The next morning Astrit received a telephone call from Robert Petroja telling him that they had caught the perpetrator red-handed: A woman who had used a knife. She was being held in isolation. As he put down the phone, Astrit realized that Petroja always left him with a bitter feeling. At one time Petroja "had been caught red-handed in a swindle. All he was required to do was pay the damages. Afterwards, as compensation, he was sent to a district as chief of a branch.... Astrit thought of him as a common thief. You don't belong in the party, nor the Sigurimi, not even as a cook."

Besnik, the fingerprint expert, tells Astrit that he found the same fingerprints again in the same place as on the previous day. Astrit, knowledgeable to some degree about the psychology of criminals, was puzzled: "Even the enemy does absurd things, but..."

When Astrit arrived at the office of the chief of Investigations he heard the director, Ilmi Gjura, shouting at the arrested girl. Astrit expected to see a Mata Hari.

Astrit questioned the girl and looked into eyes that were empty and lifeless. She appeared to be emotionally abnormal. The girl, Minush, had punctured the tires to get even with a foreigner who had struck her motorcycle.

Chapter 2

Altin, who is in love with Elizabeth, waits for her at a meeting place, but she does not show up. She was never late, and he begins to wonder if perhaps she no longer loved him. He goes to her house, but her brother tells Altin that she had not come home yet.

Chapter 3

It took Elizabeth a long time to collect herself. "Locked in a narrow, empty and poorly lit room, after the shouting and bad treatment had ceased, Elizabeth could finally think a little about her situation." She did not understand what she could have done wrong, but from the repeated questions, the great interest shown by the investigators and the other people, the strange detailed inquiry, she knew that something big and important had happened.

Three people had arrived at her home at five in the afternoon. Elizabeth had had no reason to be frightened. "She had seen films and had heard reports about the Sigurimi, but that was all. She did not know that one day she would be confronted by them." She was told harshly that she was under arrest and was told in a rough voice: "You will tell us everything there." Her father, who asked what they wanted with his daughter, was told: "Come on, get up, chauffeur." (Elizabeth's father was a bus driver). The man reminded Elizabeth of one of the mediocre actors in common police movies. She could not understand what she could have done to "cause the Sigurimi to come to her home with such savagery." They turned the house upside down but of course found no damaging evidence.

Elizabeth would never forget the shame she felt as she went down the stairs in handcuffs, as she walked the 20 steps to the waiting automobile while the man with the big stomach pulled her with a chain like a dog. The short man walked in front with a triumphant air. Elizabeth noted his shameless look of lust.

They led her into the office of the chief where for the first time she felt a great fear of something unknown. The tight handcuffs made her wrists bleed.

Minush had married during her second year at the university. After the birth of her first child, symptoms of

her psychological illness appeared. Elizabeth passed by her house on her way to work and from time to time would greet Minush whom she had befriended. One day Minush asked Elizabeth for a knife, and after several threats from Minush, Elizabeth gave her a knife.

The short man tells Elizabeth that she is a tramp because she fraternizes with tramps. She is slapped so hard that her eyes sting, and then he says: "Throw some water on the bitch." When they mention her boyfriend, Altin, she wonders how they knew about him. She then tells them the story of the knife. She had gotten the knife from a coworker, Edi Skenderas, a jewel of a man, a communist, model worker, and honorable. She begins to fear for Edi and then suddenly realizes that "not only might ill befall her and Edi, but also their families. The short man had said bluntly: 'We will destroy kin and clan, you vile race, you enemy.'"

Chapter 4

They then went after Edi and held a meeting at his factory. Edi, also, did not know what his crime might be. Edi was taken to the department, his briefcase was searched and with great glee they found an unfinished knife. An urgent meeting of the basic party organization was held where the director of Internal Affairs, who was a delegate at the meeting, informed the comrades that Edi had made a knife which had been used to "greatly damage the country."

Edi was almost 30, and had been working since age 15. Nothing bad had ever been said about him. In fact, his photograph was on the honor bulletin board at the factory. Mico, the chief of the Investigation Department of Tirana, placed the photo in his folder, saying: "We need it for the investigation file." Despite the fact that he did not have a law degree, Mico was made chief of Investigations, "He was the one the director wanted, and even the minister could not change it."

Edi, too, was handcuffed and sent into isolation. He was stunned, as though drunk, not understanding anything. Three men were sent to search his home.

Edi found it impossible to comprehend what was happening to him. Within two hours he had lost everything of value which he had gained by the sweat of his brow for the past 15 years. He finally accepted this fact but found it horrible to consider "the damage he had caused his country." Especially in his case; a man who came from a respectable family, whose father was a Communist, his grandfather a martyr, his sister a Communist, and he himself a Communist worker. If he had indeed hurt his country he did not wish to live any longer. Edi was convinced that his country would not provoke him without cause.

He wanted a cigarette, but "they had taken them from him, as well as his matches, even his belt, his shoelaces, the metal buttons of his work trousers." As a serious person who had been taught to obey every rule, he waited to be called and questioned.

"They called him at midnight, just as he had begun to doze. Two policemen handcuffed him and dragged him down the corridor like a very dangerous man." He wanted to tell them that he was not a criminal, but kept silent.

He was taken to the office of the chief of Investigations. "He moved slowly because he was numb to the marrow in his bones from the cold in the empty isolation room. But what could be done about the ice in his spirit?"

He was asked about the knife. What knife? he asks. "We ask the questions, not you!" He had made two knives: One was in his work box, the other one he had given to Elizabeth two days before. He told them about both knives. The short man demanded to know the purpose of the knives. Edi replies: "Not for any wrong purpose." The interrogators remark: "So, it was by chance that a serious crime was committed with one of these knives!" Edi replies: "I don't know what crime has been committed; please tell me."

The short man, Ilmi Gjura, says: "Listen to the scoundrel," and then proceeds to bombard Edi with a stream of dirty names which Edi hadn't heard even from tramps. All night they went round and round the same questions—hostile activities, hidden connections among Edi, Elizabeth, and Minush (whom Edi didn't even know) and others (whom they did not name but acted as though they knew, but wanted Edi to tell them).

Edi, however, was one of those types who do not scare easily. He had done nothing wrong, whereas these two men were treating him disgracefully. "In whose name were they acting? He didn't know. If they were acting in the name of the country it would mean that his country was treacherous. On the other hand, if they were acting as employees of the country, not in its name, they were acting in a hostile way."

Ilmi Gjura left the Investigations building at dawn. He told his chauffeur to drive the chief of the district Investigations to his home and Ilmi would walk home. He had a great responsibility in this case. The minister himself had called him in, and had gotten right to the subject: "The commandant phoned me and asked me: What are you doing at the Ministry of Internal Affairs? (Angry because he knew nothing of what had happened when the commandant had called him). Do you know what this puncturing of tires will do to our international relations?" Ilmi Gjura understood the situation and therefore was going to do all that was possible to break open the case. The minister told him: "This does not simply concern the Ministry of Internal Affairs; it concerns me because I have just been assigned to this position."

Ilmi, being a professional, tried to explain to the minister that internal links of an enemy group were lacking, but the minister cut him off short: "Forget those empty theories. This is a subversive group which is seeking to destroy our relations with other countries."

Ilmi had no recourse but to act immediately. He was quick to respond to the minister's requests. The Investigation's plan was first to prove the existence of the subversive group and then find its connection with foreign agencies. "In fact, even if no physical link is found, there are intellectual links, links of ideas between internal enemies and those on the outside—ideas that inspire internal enemies in their activities."

Two years before, Ilmi Gjura had been only an inspector. The minister had made him deputy chief of a branch and then proposed him as director of Investigations. "Ilmi was no dummy—he knew his duty and would carry it out to the best of his ability."

Chapter 5

Three or four days had passed. Astrit Murrizi had not had time to think about the case; he was busy on an old murder case. Besnik, the Tirana criminologist, appeared unexpectedly and showed Astrit two knives. "I've seen them, but they do not meet the conditions of lethal weapons, Astrit remarks, convinced that Besnik, as a professional, would agree with him. Besnik, his face reddening, explain that he had been ordered "from higher up" and in the interest of the country to say that they are lethal weapons.

Besnik could see from Astrit's face that this was nonsense. Astrit had been a criminologist himself and knew what orders from the chief meant. He recalled an incident 15 years ago when he was on leave and was called into the office by the deputy director to discuss his report on a pistol. The deputy director wanted Astrit to withdraw his report because otherwise the accused would be set free. Astrit had held his ground, saying that "the party has given us all the means necessary to prove illegal activity."

Chapter 6

Astrit knew the minister as a man who did not accept any type of argument. He considered his own ideas indisputable. In the minister's foyer Astrit was met by the other expert in the Tirana Directorate of Internal Affairs, Agron Verniku, an able technician. They had worked in the same office for two or three years and were friends. Recently, however, Astrit had noticed a change in his friend. Being in the minister's group, Agron had begun to see himself as one of the directors of the ministry, even though he held a low position.

Agron challenges Astrit's findings on the knives and Astrit's insistence that they are made of sheet metal and tells him to take care because the minister is very angry. When Astrit and Agron meet with the minister, the minister tells Astrit he does not want to interfere with his conclusions, nor will he accept his report categorically. Astrit explains why the knives are not sidearms in scientific terms, stating that a knife is legally not a weapon, just as a razor is not a weapon.

Astrit knew that the minister had obtained his law degree without any break in his work, a fact he mentioned frequently. (The minister obviously wants Astrit to state that the weapons are lethal weapons, but Astrit insists that they have to go by the law). The minister asks angrily: Are you going to help us? Are you going to do your duty?

Astrit: "I could say they are lethal weapons, but no judge will accept it."

The minister: "I will fix it with the judge."

Astrit has a strong desire to denounce them if they manipulate the judicial system. He picks up the knife and bends it into a V shape to prove that it is sheet metal, alarming the minister who fears he will ruin it. Astrit says he is sorry but cannot state anything that contradicts his scientific convictions.

The minister then decides a new committee will be formed to write a report that the knives are lethal weapons. Astrit replies that a new committee would have to be formed under his supervision, according to the regulations.

After they leave the minister's office, Agron and Asllan try to convince Astrit to change his report. An expression has been circulating the corridors of the ministry for some time that "you enter the chief's office with your own ideas, and exit with his."

Chapter 7

Astrit goes to a bar at the Palace of Culture to meet with Besnik. He reviews what has happened and cannot find anything wrong in what he has done. He cannot avoid a conflict with the minister unless he agrees to the arrest and imprisonment of innocent people. Astrit decides it is better to endure hatred, even from the minister, in order to maintain a proper stand than to denounce innocent people. He knows that this was not a case of technical error on the part of the minister.

Astrit thinks about the personnel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs who, in general, he considered uneducated. In 1966, for example, the school for training new cadres was closed. As a result, there were many Sigurimi employees without education. Only the chief of his section had a seventh grade education. "It was truly shocking that many comrades who pursued higher studies were not hired. Astrit was shocked at the ignorance of scientific methods in uncovering hostile and criminal acts."

Astrit was seeing more and more incidents where employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not study at all. It was all covered up with supposedly cultural phraseology, the claim that the party was trying to raise the cultural and professional level of the cadres. He and his friends explained this away as sentimentalism and sometimes excused incompetent employees

as normal and human. More and more frequently, however, Astrit was becoming concerned with the low professional and cultural level.

Besnik arrives and he and Astrit discuss the fact that a new report is to be written. Besnik informs Astrit that Elizabeth's family is going to be interned. Astrit refers to the case of the knives as "Trotskyite activity."

Astrit remarks: "I am a Communist, as you also are. Should we not fight seriously for respect of the law and the dignity of our citizens? Without judgment, what will innocent people think of the party and country when unjust actions occur? Doesn't this create a fighting reserve for the enemy?"

Besnik states that he has read the interrogation report of those arrested and everything is based on coincidence.

Chapter 8

Luan, who has been given responsibility to investigate the case, is sent from the ministry to discuss a new report with Astrit. "Luan did not have the patience needed in Investigations; in fact, it was said that he used violence against defendants—a very serious matter for an inspector." Astrit continues to stand by his original report that the knives are not lethal weapons.

Astrit tells Luan that in cases such as this there is a lot of attention, too many people get involved, but that gradually they leave everything to Investigations. "The party requires us to expose offenders quickly, but also requires us to respect the law under all circumstances."

Luan knew that Asllan and Agron Verniku had written another report and that the one from Astrit would be removed from the file.

When Astrit discusses the whole affair with his close friend Konstandin, Konstandin tells Astrit about an incident that occurred to him when he had been sent to look into a fire that had broken out in Sarande. The minister had ordered him to arrest the guilty persons. When Konstandin did not find anyone to accuse he returned without arresting anyone. The minister was furious with him and did not even give him a chance to explain. Konstandin remarks that "those who invent stories are believed. One now must step aside so as not to be compromised. They are the ones who get results: They are promoted, they travel outside the country, they take care of themselves." Astrit responds that these are people without character.

Konstandin, answering Astrit's question about the removal of his report from the file, assures him that this is indeed the case and that nothing can be done about it, but Astrit says that he still believes in goodness and honor. He picks up a book by Enver Hoxha: "I advise you to read the analysis of Koci Xoxe's Trotskyism at the First Congress." Konstandin replies that that is exactly what he has been reading.

Chapter 9

Two days later Astrit meets with his former teacher, Hasan Begolli, who is employed at the party Central Committee apparat. Begolli, a competent individual, would understand the situation as he was one of the authors of the scientific method for determining lethal weapons. Astrit tells his story briefly and clearly and Hasan comments: "You have acted properly; it's good that you have not 'conformed'.... It's good to be passionate, otherwise truth cannot be protected.... But you should pull in the reins on your enthusiasm somewhat so that the cause will not be obscured.... You're in a delicate situation, skating on thin ice; one false step, and the ice will break." He advises Astrit not to appear to defend this case with passions, to remain detached, and then "as you know, it must be discussed in the party. They're not so stupid as not to know that you can go higher up, even up to the party Central Committee, and cause them harm. They, therefore, can put the report in the file, present the file to higher authorities, and attack you as a person who seeks to create problems, who is a liar, and who is involved in intrigue. After they have washed their hands of you, they will continue doing what they have been doing. The party, on the other hand, needs you, dear friend, needs all of us to serve the people so that innocent people will not suffer, but instead those who make false accusations will suffer, and especially so that the party and the people will be protected from them." Astrit suddenly understands how he should act. Hasan asks Astrit how the investigation is going in general.

Astrit: "I don't know how to tell you; it's like a club in the hand of the Sigurimi. It depends on the deputy minister who is also the Sigurimi director. This is where the problem lies."

Hasan: "If Investigations is not separated from Sigurimi it cannot do its job."

The first person that Astrit went to see after his meeting with Hasan was Besim Lika. It was clear that Ilmi Gjura had already gotten to Besim with his side of the story. Besim: "You have your opinions, but it will be done according to the minister. That is what the party here has decided."

Astrit: "I'm afraid the minister has been misinformed and difficulties can arise—unauthorized persons will do the tests."

Besim: "The minister will give them authority.... Don't forget that we have a duty to obey orders."

Astrit: "But not those which go against scientific regulations and methods!" Astrit then remembers Hasan's advice to remain calm, but says to himself: "It's as though the minister has given them all the brains of a donkey."

Chapter 10

Elizabeth's parents had no idea why their daughter was imprisoned. Her father was as in a trance; her mother

cried continuously; her brother refused to go to school because his friends avoided him. Her parents at first were certain that everything would be cleared up soon, at least they would be told what their daughter had done. This hope kept them going until New Year's Eve. They were seated at the table when the police arrived to announce that the High Commission had decided to intern the family together. They were to be sent to Fike where they would live and work in the cooperative. When her father asked why, he was told: "We follow orders. Higher authorities know the reasons why."

Two days before, Mithat Magrip had been summoned by the director of Sigurimi. On his desk were two or three pages of a paper where Mithat recognized his own signature. The director, angry with Mithat because the paper he had written on the personal character of Elizabeth's family could not be used to justify imprisoning her family, said: "We asked you for a report on the family to imprison them, not to decorate them.... You should not fabricate biographic information on them, but you must use logic. Is it possible for a family to have a healthy socialist character and morals when they have educated their daughter in such a way? Interpretation is very important in the work of the State Sigurimi." He further told Mithat that he had put him on a list for work abroad, "but how can he present him as a candidate to the minister after he has written this kind of report?"

Mithat did not want to go against the Sigurimi director. Elizabeth had committed a serious crime, therefore her family could not continue to live in the midst of the capital city. He rewrote his report and the director was very happy.

Mithat had not done well in school; in fact, he barely finished the 8th grade after nine years of schooling. His parents and friends pushed him into further education. He was also under pressure from his wife to be first in his family.

After Mithat started working for the Sigurimi he noticed something surprising. His coworkers at the factory who used to ignore him were now looking at him as someone of value.

He was, however, troubled as he left the office of the director of the Sigurimi. For the first time he was asked to lie in the "higher interests of the country." Even though he was not highly intelligent, he did not want them to think him a fool. On this occasion he called white black because he was asked to do so. He was upset by his inability to deal with experienced professionals.

Mithat had thought about all this when he had left Hajri Mirat's home, but had maintained a calm demeanor in front of the Sigurimi officer, who was dressed as a civilian, and the two policemen. Ilir, the Sigurimi officer, had remained silent. He was from an intellectual family, and after he finished higher education he had become a Sigurimi officer, the dream of his youth. He was quickly disillusioned, however. His chief did not teach him anything; mostly he just bothered him with some formal

requests. Ilir was very upset thinking about the family which would be interned while others enjoyed their New Year's celebration. He had read the family's personal background and found nothing bad about them; they couldn't be more proper.

Hajri [Elizabeth's father] with his wife Shpresa and son Gezim were in a truck heading for Fike sitting on top of their belongings. He was worried: "How could he continue to believe in a government which was causing him such disaster?" Holding his son in his arms to protect him from the cold January air, he saw before him all his life; "So this is the reward of my entire life—internment, like an undesirable person, an enemy of the government!" His wife had shouted all night cursing those who had ruined them. To quiet her he had slapped her for the first time in his life.

It was snowing, so the driver stopped to put chains on the tires. Hajri offered to help, but was told sharply to stay where he was. There were tears in the covering on the truck and when it began to sleet, the rain and sleet fell on their clothing and furnishings. On their small salaries and with two children to rear, they had had to economize. They had not had any help. They had bought everything by the sweat of their brows.

They arrived at Fike at two in the afternoon. When he complained that they were very cold, he was told that "they would get used to it." They were taken to a one-story building, a former storehouse which had been prepared for the family. The outside door had no lock. The building consisted of two rooms without ceilings. One room had a smoke-blackened fireplace. He frantically searched for a match and some wood, convinced that the fire would calm him and give him faith. He was so much in need of faith.

Chapter 11

Astrit was summoned to an urgent meeting at the Directorate of Investigations. There were several people there, including the director of Internal Affairs. The director asks Astrit why he hadn't given them his report.

Astrit: "I gave it to you."

Director: "Give us the one we want."

Astrit, angry: "No, because in five to six months we ourselves will go to jail in place of those unfortunate people."

Director: "I expelled someone from the party.... Do you know that I am responsible?"

Astrit: "I don't know about your being responsible for expelling someone from the party, but you are greatly responsible for something else...you controlled the details for the arrests."

Astrit was thinking: "What will these people do if the party asks for an accounting? They will certainly blame each other. Those who blunder have no principles, and therefore even friendship among them has no foundation."

Ilmi Gjura interrupts to say that they have been called to the meeting to inform them that there is a rumor being spread that the woman who punctured the tires is emotionally unstable. This not only is not true, he says, but this does not help the investigation. "The minister said that if we learn who is spreading these rumors, severe measures will be taken against them." Ilmi continues: "As for you, Astrit, you would be well advised to rewrite the report.... Class struggle is not achieved through classic bourgeois themes of criminology." Astrit responds: "Each person must carry out his duty according to his own ideological and professional convictions."

Chapter 12

Altin learned of Elizabeth's arrest from his friends. He loved her, without doubt. He found nothing to criticize. What should he do? He had not told his brother about his relationship with Elizabeth. He then thought about Mithat Magripi. He knew Mithat, and, like all the young people, idealized him because he worked for the Sigurimi.

Altin went to the Directorate of Internal Affairs and sought out Mithat. (While shaving in the morning Mithat practices in his mirror how to give sharp looks so that he would appear more authoritative. He'd been doing this since he became a Sigurimi officer.) He greeted Altin in a friendly manner, but could not remember his name, although he recognized him.

Mithat tells Altin that Elizabeth has been arrested and asks Altin for information about her because "you must help the party." He tells Altin that he, Altin, has not made any promises to Elizabeth, that the law has separated them, and that he should not tie his life to an enemy.

Altin feels sorry for Elizabeth. What had gotten so messed up? Was it something intentional or accidental? He remembers their special song and how happy they had been, but for such a brief period. Was it interrupted or ended?

Altin was summoned to Investigations and he wondered whether the officials had decided on their own to talk to him or whether Mithat had told them about their conversation. It was a cold, rainy day and he had spent an unpleasant New Year's Day. His family had wanted him to be with them, whereas he wanted to be alone. He had planned to spend the day with Elizabeth and their friends. But it was not to be.

Investigations was located in the former prison and, embarrassed, Altin held his umbrella low so that no one would recognize him. He dreaded the conversation at

Investigations. What could they ask him? What did he know? Nothing. In fact, he was the one who should be asking questions, to find out the truth about Elizabeth.

Altin, summoned to the chief's [Mico] office, says in response to the chief's question about his relationship with Mithat: "We are friends; we worked together at the factory." Altin blushed because he had presented himself unintentionally as closer to Mithat than was the case. The chief tells Altin that they have arrested his girl friend, Elizabeth. "We have called you here to testify about her activities."

Altin: "I don't know why she has been arrested; I don't know anything about what she had done."

Mico: "You don't know, eh? I'll tell you: Together with an enemy group, she has committed a subversive act. Does that suffice?"

Altin: "I know nothing about it, but you have no right to say she is my girl friend."

Mico: "You are right to deny it because it is not honorable to have as a girl friend a woman who is filthy, who isn't even a virgin. I'm not telling any secrets. She herself has admitted to having had three lovers before you.... We want to expose this girls' morals. She is our enemy and a degenerate. You must be sincere with your country."

Altin: "I know nothing. Find someone else for such work."

Mico: "We don't need instructions from you. First we will write down your refusal, then we will do an investigation and confront you."

Mico put a blank sheet of paper in his typewriter and began to type biographic information. Altin, is confused: "Suppose that out of fear she has said things that are not true? It was not in his nature to lie, and even less so to slander Elizabeth. Suppose they force me? This man could do anything. He began as a hypocrite, but could finish with a club." He had never had any dealings with Investigations but knew that anything could happen to him.

Mico removed the paper from the typewriter and handed it to Altin to sign. Altin read it carefully and when assured that it was correct, he signed it.

Chapter 13

Walter Milja, teacher at the Political-Legal Sciences Faculty at the University of Tirana, and author of some educational texts and other books, had extensive knowledge of the theories of jurisprudence. He was well-bred, widely cultured, spoke four foreign languages. He had everyone's respect.

One evening Walter received a call from Agron Verniku of the Ministry of Internal Affairs asking to meet with him the following morning to discuss a problem. Agron

had been one of his correspondence students. Having concentrated on education, the work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs seemed to Walter remote, somewhat surreptitious, infamous, and of course, frightening. He was hardly able to sleep that night: What did they want? He had never been called before. He smiled remembering something one of his colleagues, a teacher of penal law, had said: "We jurists are afraid because we know the laws well."

Walter is shown the two knives and given the memorandum on the lab results. He signs readily, but then has doubts: Why did they need his signature? It was, however, too late—he couldn't turn back. He is given a copy of the memorandum and is told that the court hearing would be the following day and he may be needed for questioning.

Walter worries all day: Why did they call him? Did they not have their own specialists? Why wasn't one of their specialists there? What is their purpose?

Chapter 14

Minush, Edi Skenderas and Elizabeth are sentenced to four months for subversion as well as for carrying weapons illegally. Astrit knows that these three were sentenced for a crime they had not committed. He is also surprised to learn that Walter Milja had given evidence in the case as a professor and expert. He realizes "it is dangerous to continue his battle, but to remain silent while innocent people are sentenced is disgraceful".... His friend Basim tries to convince him to leave the matter alone, but Astrit says that he is troubled by false accusations.

Two days later he presented the case to the basic party organization. The room was silent; no one made any comments about the problem Astrit has raised. In the halls, however, they said all sorts of things about the minister. As he was leaving, some were against him for his conflict with the minister. Others shook his hand; his closest friends told him he had acted well. Astrit was surrounded by the minister's hatred. He knew very well that the minister was angry with him, that he could take out his revenge on Astrit.

In the past the minister had praised his work and his ability, and would treat him to coffee. But Astrit had always remained cautious because he did not want to be beholden to anyone, not even the minister, especially since he didn't like the minister.

The minister had quickly gotten the reputation of being able to resolve all problems. Even the former minister considered him the most competent. But Astrit was not impressed. He could see that the minister did not give honors and favors from the goodness of his heart; he did so with the country's resources by exploiting his position. He had surrounded himself with a motley crew but did not like to associate with most of the workers. He even made fun of his close friends to whom he had given positions around him. Astrit refused to put himself in

such a position. The minister wanted to ignore him, but being a good Sigurimi "craftsman" he would from time to time say to Astrit's friends that "Astrit is a good specialist," he is "cultured." Astrit knew that this was no more than hot air.

Astrit meets with Walter Milja and is struck by the professor's frightened eyes and feels sorry for this old honorable man. "They have flattered him, but they do not flatter without instilling fear."

Astrit gets right to the subject of the knives: "According to the penal code, the court should have informed you that two other tests were made before which determined that the knives were not lethal weapons. Both reports were removed from the file and replaced by another report written by unauthorized persons. Why have you done something you've never done before? You are honest in your work."

Walter, with the look of a child caught doing wrong, responds: "But they asked me to do so. What could I do?"

Astrit: "The law does not authorize you to perform such a task. There is an institution assigned for it. This could have been your way out. Do you know, professor, that they have used and will use your name for an unjust legal action? Do you know that evidence has been falsified to convict those people?"

Astrit no longer felt sorry for the professor. He was an egotist and a coward—that's how they had uncovered him and exploited him. "You tremble now for the honor of your name and you don't care about the plight of the innocent people who have been sentenced." He could no longer stay there and left without a good-bye.

Chapter 15

Edward Skenderas was in isolation for three months. At first he thought the misunderstanding would be resolved quickly and he would be freed. He had never done anything against his country or party. At Investigations, however, they were doing everything possible to prove that he knew about Minush's crime. Edward in fact did not even know what she looked like. When he was confronted by Minush, who was referred to as the "leader of the subversive group," he nearly went out of his mind when she stated that Edward Skenderas was one of the members of the group and that he was the one who had obtained the knife to cause strife between Albania and other countries. He could not forget the cynical smile of the chief of Investigations.

In addition to being accused of participating in a "subversive group," Edi was also accused of embezzling socialist property. He had taken some material for a water heater, but had done the same for the director and chief engineer, but Mico did not take this into account. He admitted that he had misused state goods. The official statement, however, listed items which he had

not stolen but had bought at the state store. Investigations had inflated the value of the goods to 2,000 leks, thus making his case a penal case.

Then a final accusation: Three or four of his coworkers had reported on his conversations. They had twisted his remarks and Edi tried to clarify them and put them in context. He refused to sign two of the official statements where his remarks had not been reported correctly. "Big deal," he thought. "Others had been tried without opening their mouths."

Edi was sentenced to two years. Although he denounced the procedures of Investigations, the judges were deaf to his complaints. His family and friends were not allowed to testify. Only the Investigations team was present.

He planned to appeal but then thought that perhaps his fate had been decided: "These people from Investigations will never let go. But why, why? What have I done to be ousted from the party, to be separated from my family? Perhaps I am not the first one to whom this has happened, but I will fight; I will fight. It is not possible that my country, my party, is doing this to me.... Three or 10 dirty ones in Investigations can say: 'You are arrested in the name of the people. You are sentenced to two years deprivation of freedom in the name of the people.' Yes, it could happen this way. This must be the class struggle I've been hearing so much about. Perhaps this is happening to me so that I can understand the class struggle even within the party."

Chapter 16

Astrit tells his wife that he has done something that may endanger her and the children. Impressing on her the seriousness of the situation he says that "there are some who are expert at creating situations where I will make a mistake, or they will find a pretext. First I will be expelled from the party. Then I may be removed from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.... I have decided to leave the Ministry of Internal Affairs."

Chapter 17

Astrit waited a full 15 days after raising the problem at the organization meeting, and then went to the secretary to complain that no action had been taken regarding the violations of the law which he, Astrit, had raised at the last meeting. When the secretary told him there was no need for concern, Astrit thought about going to see the secretary of the party committee but decided instead to go to the Attorney General's office to see an old acquaintance, a former investigator, who was now an inspector.

Astrit recalls that, when the Ministry of Internal Affairs was centralized, surprisingly none of the investigators, cultured and experienced men, were brought into the ministry.... Investigations hired many former Sigurimi operatives who, although they had completed or were attending the Political-Legal Sciences Faculty, were trained in both the good and the bad aspects of secret Sigurimi work.

The Investigations control inspector asked Astrit for copies of the reports and the verdict of Investigations. (Astrit had photocopied the report and had hidden the negatives. He had to go to Agron Verniku's office to make the photocopies).

The inspector tells Astrit that he has read the file and that there are other aspects that have been falsified and he has notified the Attorney General. Astrit tells the Inspector that he also intends to go to the head of the Supreme Court, and perhaps even to the Central Committee in case pressure is put on the Inspector and he loses courage. The Inspector is insulted, but decides to ignore the remark.

Astrit wanted to share the good news with someone, but knew that this was only the beginning. The next day he went to the High Court and told the chief that he had presented the situation to the Attorney General's office as though it was a suspicion on his part. "In reality, we have here a typical case where evidence is collected with preconceived ideas and then the evidence is falsified! The minister himself has played the most damaging role in this case." The chief, who had read the report about falsification, asks: "Perhaps the minister has been influenced or misinformed?" Astrit replies: "I myself have spoken to him and explained the case from a legal and scientific viewpoint."

The chief tells Astrit that he has given the order to return the case to Investigations, and that a new test will be made by a committee of experts. With that he congratulates Astrit. Astrit gets up to leave, thinking: "Why congratulations? I did my duty and will do it to the end." He wanted to tell the chief to inform the party Central Committee but decided not to because "he knows his duty."

Chapter 18

At a meeting, Besim Lika comments about an incident in Kruje where "our comrades beat up one of the citizens. We investigated, and although we could not prove it, we were convinced that they had beaten him." Astrit interrupts, saying that being convinced should result from an investigation, otherwise it is subjective.... For example: We suspect that three people have committed a crime, but our investigation does not uncover any proof. I say that we are wrong if we put them in prison simply because we are convinced of their guilt."

Outside the meeting Besim asks Astrit "what is the matter with you? You're always quarreling. You seem to think that those around you are intentionally behaving badly.... Why are you so conceited? You have denounced activities of our organs to the Attorney General and the Supreme Court." Besim was using the tactic of attacking, and Astrit wondered whether he did so on his own or whether he had been ordered to do so by someone else. Astrit replies: "First of all, these are not 'our organizations' but the party's. The institutions you mentioned are also the party's. Is this my error? Is this why I am conceited?"

Besim: "You should have gone to the minister, not there."

Astrit: "You know very well that the minister ordered these actions.... I am a Communist, and, according to the party statute, I can go anywhere to protect people against wrongs.... If need be I will go to the party Central Committee and perhaps even to Enver Hoxha! This is my legal right."

Astrit meets with his friend Konstandin who has made arrangements for Professor Walter Milja to join them at a coffee house. The Professor says that he was wrong and to right the wrong he went to the head of the Supreme Court and gave a self-criticism at the basic organization. He adds that he is not ready to apologize to the victims. Astrit feels sorry for him.... "One is always learning something new throughout life; better late than never."

Chapter 19

The scene turns to the village of Fike where Hajri [Elizabeth's father] is interned. After two months Hajri has become accustomed to the place. His wife complains that the villagers keep away from them, as though they are diseased. At a celebration on the anniversary of the Republic given on 11 January everyone gathered in front of the house of culture, but everyone turned their backs on Hajri and his family.

One internee, Brace, who was a scoundrel and a drunkard, tried to ingratiate himself with Hajri, but Hajri wanted to have nothing to do with him. The policeman of the sector, Asqeri Xhika, had warned Hajri to keep his eyes open, because Brace was a degenerate. One day, Brace, drunk says to the brigade members who were digging holes for planting fruit trees: "We, too, are having a class struggle. Hajri does not speak to me, while, in fact, I don't want to speak to him because he has a daughter imprisoned for political reasons...." Eventually they got into a fight but Hajri, who had the upper hand, stopped before hurting Brace more. Hajri did not want to fall into Brace's trap. He knew that "hostility without cause from such nasty types had to be instigated by others. But who?"

Asqeri sent Hajri to the doctor to tend to his wounds, and before he could take the case to court he was summoned urgently to the ministry. On the way he stopped to see his brother in law, Mithat Magrip. Mithat asks his brother in law to "treat Hajri and his family well, and later, if it becomes necessary, say that I advised you." Mithat had heard that the case about the knives was exploding and that Astrit had denounced them. Mithat was trying to create "new" proof to cover up his error. Asqeri did not like his brother in law's two-faced attitude. Asqeri considered his brother in law to be one of those nauseating persons who will do something with which they do not agree, but who do not fail to take measures to avoid compromise.

Mithat knew Brace, who was a distant relative of Robert Petroja. The latter repeatedly got Brace out of trouble

until even Robert could not save him. Finally Brace reached a point where he could either go to prison or internment, and Robert had chosen the lighter sentence.

Mithat realizes that they want to put Hajri in prison, and that is why they have put Brace up to provoke him: "One sets up the internment, the other, the provocation to result in arrest. Thus the second serves to hide the first."

Chapter 20

Mithat began to panic because if the case about the knives comes to light the party would dig deeper, so he decided to get advice from Ilir who had been with him when they went to intern the family. Ilir was about to request to leave the Sigurimi. He did not like the methods they used, as in the case of the knives. He could not abide underhanded, insincere people like Mithat. Mithat whispers to Ilir that he has heard that there was nothing to that story about the "subversive group." Ilir responds that he has heard the same, adding: "There were some ugly false statements; those people were denounced and interned for nothing.... I can't forget that family when we went together on New Year's Eve."

Mithat replies: "Oh, that girl's family," as though he were recalling an incident that had happened years ago.... The chief had told him to be in the office at 11 pm. He took upon himself the execution of a criminal sentenced to death 'to strengthen the heart against the enemy,' he had told the chief."

Ilir wrote three pages of self-criticism, but also explained his concerns. He signed it and put it in his briefcase. There was time to deliver it.

Chapter 21

Asqeri went to Robert Petroja's office at the ministry. He had never had any occasion to deal with the ministry. He immediately took a dislike to Robert and his tone of voice. Robert asks about the two people interned in Fike and Asqeri answers that Brace behaves very badly, whereas the other one is a good man.

Robert: "A good man? But he is interned!"

Asqeri: "I didn't say he should be made head of the cooperative.... I said he is well-behaved, polite."

Robert: "But he was beaten with a stick."

Asqeri: "Yes, he even has a medical report about the wounds, and there are witnesses. If he had wanted to, he could have killed Brace, but instead he threw the stick away and turned his back on Brace. That is why I say he is a good man."

Robert tells Asqeri that the family has been interned for a serious enemy action. "When we engage in a class struggle, we must differentiate among our people. For example, although Brace made a mistake, he is one of

ours.... He is very corrupt, but his father is honorable. Therefore we must support him because his father has fought."

When Asqeri responds that Hajri also has a good background, Robert reminds him that Hajri's daughter has committed a serious crime as a member of a subversive group. "Could she have done so if she had had a proper education in the family?" Robert adds the highest leadership of the party had learned about these subversive activities and the order for internment had come from the highest level.

Robert was annoyed with Asqeri when he learned that Asqeri had nearly completed his degree in Political-Legal Sciences; he was annoyed that Asqeri had the attitude of being an equal to Robert. He had been trying to understand the reason for Asqeri's arrogance, and there it was: Education. "This one, a mere policeman, was getting a law degree." Robert had worked hard at Sigurimi; he had concentrated on work, not school.

Asqeri knew what they wanted him to do, but he had no intention of doing so. In the end Robert did not have the nerve to give him any orders. He also had to protect himself from compromise.

Chapter 22

A criminologist from Gjirokaster arrives at Astrit's office. He and others have been asked by the director of Investigations to do a test on the knives. Astrit calls Ilmi to complain that it is against regulations because it is Astrit's office that has the authority to qualify criminologists in this area.

A meeting headed by Mico is held at Investigations in the office where they had first encountered Minush. The psychiatric experts had determined that Minush was considered responsible for her actions. "Certainly if pressure is exerted on criminologists, why not on psychiatrists?" Mico explains that the group of experts have been called to do a test. Astrit reiterates his disagreement with the decision to call in criminologists from other districts. He sees Agron Verniku at the meeting and thinks to himself: "You're not stupid, but you think that you can hide in the shadow of the minister."

Astrit complains that Mico has called in criminologists that he doesn't know, and then, referring to Agron, those who have no right to be called experts, explaining that the minister had taken the right away from Agron and had assigned him to different work. Astrit announces that he refuses "to sign any document with this man."

Agron was known everywhere as literary and scientific editor, a foreign language specialist, an archivist, competent in the field of equipment, knowledgeable about fashion, very knowledgeable in the field of medicine. Everyone sought his opinions.

Astrit also asks why they are meeting at the office of Investigations: "Where are our technical means; how can

we accomplish scientific tests?" Mico, frightened by this intense questioning, feels as though his thoughts are being revealed. He agrees they should go to their own laboratories. He says that as for Agron, "we have been ordered to include him in the commission since he has written a report for Investigations and has gone before the court." Astrit insists that Agron has no role in the commission: "let him write his own report." Agron is crushed.

Luan, reviewing what had occurred, realizes that the strongest is not the one who has a position. "The one who uncovers the truth is the strongest."

Chapter 23

Altin's brother advises him to break off his relationship with Elizabeth, even if it turns out that she is innocent. Mithat Magripi had also given the same advice, saying: "The court may declare Elizabeth innocent, but she will have to deal with us for the rest of her life." Altin thinks: "So, according to Mithat's logic, the State declares innocence, the Sigurimi does not."

Altin's brother tells him: "We are a respectable family with government ties. Our father is a Communist, as well as I.... Look around you; everyone acts this way. This is the class struggle...."

Altin thinks: "Yeah, class struggle. It's right when Elizabeth commits a hostile act, but when she is innocent, isn't she a victim of the struggle?"

Chapter 24

Another trial is held with just the three accused and the court members and the decision is handed down quickly: Elizabeth is innocent of the charge of carrying weapons illegally and is freed; Edward and Minush are accused of other crimes.

The policeman removes her handcuffs and Mico, who is very worried about what may happen to him, tells her: "We are releasing you even though you are very much at fault. You know what you have done, but our party is bighearted.... You must not say anything about what you have heard or seen here. You know that we will hear about it if you talk and next time we won't free you."

Elizabeth needed a bath and needed to stretch out on a clean bed, to hear the birds singing, to hear music and dream with her eyes closed.

It is early in the morning when she goes to her home eager to see her family. An old woman answers the door and tells Elizabeth that it is now her home and that Elizabeth's parents have been interned. She tells Elizabeth to check with the police to find out where her parents are interned.

After a tearful session on the park bench where she and Altin used to meet, she decides against going to the police but goes instead to her mother's aunt who had always loved her. Elizabeth had not taken care of her appearance in jail.

Whenever she had looked in the mirror it had seemed as though it were someone else. Now she had the desire to look pretty. She straightens herself and quickens her step. She stops to eat something before going to her aunt's home. (She had had 30 leks when she went to prison and this money was returned to her).

Her mother's aunt is stunned when she sees Elizabeth at the door. Elizabeth senses her coldness, but enters; there is a long period of silence between them. Elizabeth explains that she has been declared innocent and has been freed, but the aunt is not impressed, thinking: "Your situation is like that of a virgin. You are as innocent as a virgin who has slept with a man." She wanted the girl to leave before her son came home. She loved her niece [Elizabeth's mother] more than any of her nieces, but she did not wish to become entangled in Elizabeth's affair. She finally offers her something to eat and a bath, but Elizabeth feels that her great-aunt is acting as though Elizabeth has the plague, so she decides to leave. Her aunt tells her that her parents have been sent to Fike.

As Elizabeth leaves she realizes that this is how Altin will also greet her. Perhaps even her parents will not accept her. She takes the bus to Fike.

Chapter 25

Everyone in the ministry heard about Astrit's denunciation. A few disapproved, some openly, but most praised him. In fact, one day he was encouraged when he received a call from Hasan Begolli from the party Central Committee apparat praising him. This was the atmosphere when a basic organization meeting was held where Astrit laid out in detail his denunciation. The secretary criticized the party committee of the ministry for failing to take action after being informed about the problem. An official statement would be sent to the party committee.

Astrit began to do something he had never done before: He began to keep exact records of the meetings, the number of pages of the official statement, the number of memoranda, and anything else that might be of importance in a future investigation.

Konstandin meets his friend Astrit and tells him that a memorandum on this case had been read at the basic organization meeting and members were told that the minister had given orders to work with urgency, but the memorandum was only directed at the Tirana Directorate of Investigations, and then Konstandin realizes that "the minister is trying to wash his hands of it, like Pontius Pilate."

Konstandin and Astrit discuss the ruling and whether it is serious or just a maneuver. Konstandin tells Astrit that he had openly disagreed with the ruling because "they had failed to describe it as it was, namely falsification of evidence, but instead said that it was a result of an error, of superficial work. Those who were responsible for this

crime were being pampered, whereas some people had been denounced for a crime they did not commit. Ilmi Gjura and the secretary of the party committee of the ministry well know that the opinion of the basic organization and the directorate is against them, even if most of them did not say so openly. "...It was reported that the control sector of Investigations had uncovered these shortcomings, but everyone knows that you raised the problem."

Astrit realizes that it was "fear of the party and the Central Committee that had made them uncover the case. They were afraid that Communists would inform on them. "He was convinced" they would hurry to inform higher levels of their version of this "great" meeting. Or the minister himself would find an occasion to inform higher authorities about this event and the measures he had taken to "strengthen the legal system."

Astrit tells Konstandin: "I am now going to distance myself from this case, otherwise these wolves will devour me 'with great sincerity.' You know how they behave in such cases. First they find a pretext, then they try to present it as fact; they know how to propagandize it as a serious error and will expel you from the party. They remove you from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and you are 'depersonalized'...and their shadow will follow you everywhere."

Astrit continues: "I will find a way to satisfy both sides: Myself and them. They want to get rid of me, but I also want to leave. For a long time I have felt as an outsider in the ministry and at meetings. More and more walls of ice are being built around me.... I know the builders of these walls.... You can't expect good things from these types of people."

Chapter 26

From afar Hajri sees a young girl coming and his heart begins to pound. It is Elizabeth coming toward him. There is a joyful and tearful reunion.

The villagers had come to know Hajri as a hard working man and were glad for him. His difficulties with Brace were long forgotten. The entire brigade had been witnesses and now Brace was in jail.

Hajri reads the court's decision which his daughter hands him and he reads that his daughter was declared innocent. "But what about the hostile action? What happened to the subversive group? He began to see something here. A great deception was behind this case. Otherwise, why did they try to provoke him with that degenerate bum, Brace? Did they want to imprison him? Why? He was convinced that someone was interested in having Hajri, a respectable worker, believe that this harin was caused by his party, his country, so that he would go against them."

While Hajri was thinking all this, Asqeri, the policeman, arrives. He had heard from his brother in law, Mithat Magrip, that the girl had been freed. Hajri reminded him

of his own brother. "Suppose something like this had happened to my brother? What would I do? We must also be guided by this, not by Christian mercy, to carry out the laws of the country correctly."

Asqeri advises Hajri to write to the party to tell them about his daughter's case and his internment. Hajri had thought about writing to the party but had decided against it because he reasoned that the party knew he was respectable, the party had learned that his daughter was innocent and surely the party would punish the culprits. But he promises to consider writing now that Asqeri has advised him.

Chapter 27

Ilmi Gjura was not surprised by what happened. "If not from Astrit Murrizi, the denunciation would have come from someone else. But since Astrit knew the mechanics of the country he was able to do it quickly. If it had happened somewhere else, Ilmi could have fixed it, but the damage was partial: Only the girl was freed, whereas two others remained in prison for other crimes. Not bad!" He had to try to make sure that the girl would have no contacts and that nothing would come to light. He thus discussed his plan with the Sigurimi director that Elizabeth's family should not be let out of internment under any circumstances. He was able to speak on such terms with his colleague because they had been involved in many situations, but in this case, the Sigurimi director had bungled the internment of Hajri's family.

The director said nothing, but Ilmi knew his chief well, and the silence meant that he was giving Ilmi a free hand to protect themselves. The director was very careful not to say anything publicly. The party committee secretary gave them a great deal to help by analyzing the ruling written by Ilmi and signed by one of the deputy ministers.... The Ministry of Internal Affairs would raise the roof for even the slightest violation of the law.

Nevertheless Ilmi was concerned. Usually every afternoon he would go in the office, leave the door open, and, while reading, keep his ears open to hear when the minister came out. They would go out together. The secretary of the party committee, the Sigurimi director and Robert Pretoja all did the same. The minister would walk one step ahead of them along the boulevard to show people that he was a leader with a "new style of work."

Ilmi, waiting for Luan, "the investigator of this cursed case," is thinking about Astrit Murrizi and is terrified. "At times it seemed that Astrit wanted to tell him something, but this frightened him more than anything. Perhaps he wanted to remind him of his poor peasant background, his family's patriotism, the wrong road he had chosen." Ilmi judged himself in the eyes of his children, his wife, his relatives, his father who remained in the village and was proud of his son and his position. "No, he would not listen to Astrit; he would try to get out of this himself." He often cursed himself for having gotten into a close relationship with the minister "who never tells you directly what he wants from you.... The

minister knew how to manipulate him. Sometimes he said the orders were from higher up; sometimes he would engage in dubious theoretical discussions so that Ilmi did not dare contradict him."

Luan finally arrives. He had rehearsed some remarks full of irony and insult, but he finds a tired and quiet Ilmi and feels sorry for him. Luan was one of those types who act almost as though intoxicated when they are in the presence of a chief...Astrit and Besnik, discussing Luan, comment that these types "become like wet chickens when they think that the case will go to the party Central Committee."

Chapter 28

Astrit and the organization secretary meet with the party committee secretary. Astrit, looking at the party committee secretary, says to himself: "You must have attended a diplomatic school in the Soviet Union. You must have worked in a district party committee, and, in order to be elected party committee secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, you became an intimate friend of the minister.... The minister simply used him for his own purposes. The minister attained his position with this man's support.... The minister was a master of increasing his influence over others by using pressure." Astrit knew, for instance that the party committee secretary had a relative by marriage who was antiparty. This undesirable fact was a good way to exert pressure.

After some roundabout discussion, they discuss the problems that Astrit had raised at the organization meeting. He is told that nothing like this had happened before, that he did well to raise the issue, but it would have been even better if he had gone "to the minister or to us. We can correct our mistakes as easily as others can correct us." Astrit responds: "True, but the others are also comrades of party institutions, of our country." The party committee secretary tells Astrit that they have reprimanded Ilmi Gjura, but Astrit remarks to himself: "...and the others were put in prison. Even when Ilmi once lost his party card, the committee secretary and minister had reprimanded him, whereas others would have been demoted to candidate level or expelled."

Astrit had been trying to find a pretext to leave the Ministry of Internal Affairs and takes this occasion to ask for leave to work on his desertion for his graduate school. The minister had not agreed to the leave and Astrit asks for the secretary's intervention. After working at the ministry for 20 years Astrit was convinced that support from educated people remained at the planning level. The chiefs did this in order to abide by the party directive to be "modern." In practice they leaned toward those without education. Astrit could not forget that in 1966, when the party engaged in an open struggle against bureaucracy, most of the educated young people were fired from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and cadres with seven-year education were kept on with the excuse that they needed work until they were of pension age.

Even now the chiefs, who in most cases had no education, chose among the educated people those with limited knowledge and with vices.

Chapter 29

A meeting was finally held with the minister. Astrit entered the minister's office with Besim Lika and Agron Verniku where they found the minister at his desk immersed in some material he was reading. He raised his head slightly and told them to sit down. He continued to read for a while without paying any attention to them.

Astrit was seated facing the library. It was a large library.... He had never seen one as beautiful. But there were few books. He noticed a French encyclopedia (the minister did not know a word of French), the complete works of Jack London in Russian, and the works of Comrade Enver. Most of the shelves were empty. Everyone knew that as soon as he had obtained his new position the minister had requested a complete renovation. He went on vacation to the shore while his daughter, an architect, took on the job of renovating the office. Desks, chairs, curtains, lamps and lampshades were ordered. Everything was new and of the best quality. Astrit remembered a comical scene a friend of his had described when the minister had been ill and he and Ilmi Gjura, along with some others went to the minister's home. The minister kept them waiting more than a quarter of an hour. When he entered the room he was dressed in very luxurious pajamas, a robe, and a scarf around his neck, while he held a copy of Marx's "Das Kapital." Astrit's friend had been shocked by this ridiculous spectacle, but Ilmi Gjura said emotionally as they left: "He is sick, but did you see what he is reading? 'Das Kapital!'"

Astrit repeats his request for leave to complete his dissertation and when the minister refuses Astrit states that he wants to resign. The minister asks for his resignation in writing. (The minister and Astrit had been on bad terms since their first major conflict during a party committee meeting to discuss Investigations. During the meeting, Investigations had been clearly represented as a part of Sigurimi. Astrit had argued that it did not belong to Sigurimi, but to the State).

When leaving the minister's office, Besim asks Astrit if he really intends to leave: "You will lose your salary, your uniforms." Astrit answers: "The majority of the people don't live badly without them."

Chapter 30

Sitting on a park bench Astrit recalls the recent events and is convinced that something is wrong at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, that things are not as they should be, and that someone was trying to divert the ministry's attention from its main objective.... "Astrit had heard, not without fear and alarm, the minister's shouts for more hits, more arrests."

On the other hand, Astrit was beginning to be convinced that the party was being given disinformation; the facts as presented were lies. There was also disinformation in the party because the party committee secretary censored information and did as the minister told him.

Sigurimi and Investigations teams went to the districts to spread propaganda about the minister's qualifications, referring to him as the right person to head the Sigurimi. They would decide which was the good branch, which one was not, according to the minister's wishes, and they did not find it difficult to carry out his orders because the minister had surrounded himself with persons who were masters at doing this kind of nasty work. As soon as he became minister he cleaned out the Sigurimi apparatus of people of the "old style"...and selected new people who lacked character or had poor backgrounds. Everyone knew, for example, that the Sigurimi director was a drunkard. The director also had a brother who had been accused of stealing.... Despite all this mess, the party committee secretary supported him.

Astrit thought about the girl who had been arrested.... "Something powerful was hindering justice. This undoubtedly went as high up as the minister, otherwise he could not explain the fact that one of his friends in the Foreign Trade Ministry had not been arrested after he was found guilty of fraud. He had simply been returned to party candidate status and removed from the trade office.

Anyone who dared say anything had suffered. The wrongdoing was centered in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Astrit had read thoroughly the analysis of Koci Xoxe's activities made at the First Congress and he found similarities with that period.

Astrit decides he has to inform the party about all that he knows, but only the facts; the party would reach its own conclusions.

He knew he had to move carefully and find the right moment. The best time would be after the minister signs the resignation paper, otherwise he could jeopardize himself and the case. He knew the methods they could use to "depersonalize" an individual so that his information would be considered at least dubious if not disinformation.

He did not want to involve Comrade Enver Hoxha. If the problem were considered of sufficient importance, his comrades could do so. He considered going to the former minister of internal affairs, now the minister of defense, but decided against it for two reasons: First, and foremost, the minister might tell him it was not his business. Second, this comrade, a member of the Politburo, had given the green light to assigning a man who did not have a good reputation as minister of internal affairs.... Was it opportunism? For family reasons? Or some other reason he could not explain?

Astrit decides to go to the prime minister.

Chapter 31

After some discussion with the minister and others, and after efforts to make Astrit change his mind, the minister signs Astrit's resignation.

Chapter 32

Astrit writes a brief letter to the prime minister giving the facts of the case and stating that he only knew about this violation of the law—the falsified evidence, and that the party would have to be the judge.

Meeting his friend, Hasan Begolli, an employee of the Central Committee apparatus, he realizes his anxiety about finding a job. "Where would he begin? Suppose the minister, out of revenge, were to block him and make it impossible for him to find a job? One telephone call, one visit to the youth director and casually mentioning Astrit's name would be enough to make them think twice about hiring him."

He lets Hasan read the letter to the minister and Hasan finds nothing personal and no ulterior motives in the letter. Astrit had only given facts which could easily be verified. "The letter is clear and important."

Chapter 33

Four months pass when Astrit receives an unexpected call from Burim Lira to meet him. Astrit was working in Walter Milja's faculty. He had everything he wanted: Time for his dissertation, books, his colleagues' respect, and the help of his former teacher, Milja. Nevertheless, he would often be depressed, although he tried not to show it. He had not received a response to his letter to the prime minister. He reasoned that those in higher positions were busy, that the Eighth Party Congress was approaching, etc., but these reasons did not seem to be adequate: "he has received the letter, he has scolded the minister, and that's all...."

He missed his old colleagues and was no longer angry with those who did not rise up against injustices. "Everyone is different and one cannot expect everyone to be self-sacrificing.... Indifference, apathy, and fear of opposing wrongs will greatly harm society...."

Burim Lira had attained a high position in the Sigurimi. He was well educated, attended the military academy and had a Political-Legal Science degree, and he was experienced. He was not in tune, however, with the so-called specialists and often disagreed with their methods and even disagreed with the chiefs' methods. He soon became as an outsider in the Sigurimi, despite his position as one of the directors. They hated this man who "took the bus to work, whereas the other chiefs had a car waiting for them, and who worked long hours." At first they transferred him to a district as a branch director, and after two or three years they removed him and sent him as a commissar to a section in Tirana until he became ill and was given an early pension.

Astrit gives Burim the details of what has occurred. Burim, in turn, describes a number of problems which have occurred in the higher levels of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Astrit is dumbfounded and realizes that his case is minor in comparison. They agreed that probably there are other people who have this type of information. Burim tells Astrit that he is sending his material to Enver Hoxha and that he, Astrit, should do the same.

Astrit: "Now? Just before the Eighth Congress?"

Burim: "Precisely...that is where the concerns of Communists should be sent."

Chapter 34

[The scene turns to Elizabeth.]

Elizabeth had become accustomed to working in the cooperative, but not isolation. Her father advised her to wait and be patient, that everything would work out. By the beginning of September she had lost patience; five months had passed, she was innocent, but was treated like a class enemy. Angry because she has had to miss school, has lost her job, her friends, everything, she tells her father that she is leaving. She has an argument with her father and insists that she will "go to the party and fight for her rights." Her mother had not dared to speak out but was in agreement with her daughter.

When Elizabeth left jail she had avoided people but realizing that she had done nothing shameful, that she had not committed a crime, she went right to the factory to see her friends and seek help. The chief engineer greets her with a handshake and a hug: "We knew that you had been released and we have been waiting for you," and accompanies her to see the director. The director had been surprised by the storm that had broken out around his two employees. Edi and Elizabeth were outstanding employees. He had not approved in the least the manner in which Edi had been arrested and expelled from the party. The director told her that she would be given her old job and that she was to continue her education. She was to live in the boarding school in the neighboring enterprise until her family arrived.

After he settled everything, the director left for the district party committee. He was determined to fight for his employee and her family. As a director of a large factory he was escorted into the party secretary's reception room without any formalities.

The Eighth Party Congress opens. No one wins the bet: The minister of internal affairs remains a candidate member of the party Central Committee.

Sopot Shima, an employee of the party Central Committee apparat, went to the Attorney General and the Supreme Court to verify the information reported in the

letter sent by Astrit to Enver Hoxha. He also planned to go to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

At a meeting of the party organization, the minister of internal affairs is asked to provide a written self-criticism regarding his responsibility in the engagement of the son of the prime minister to a girl whose family had members who were political escapees.

Astrit was summoned to see Sopot Shima at the party Central Committee to explain fully his letter to Enver Hoxha.

Chapter 35

Sopot Shima spent almost an hour talking in private with the secretary of the Tirana Directorate of Internal Affairs. They then asked for Luan, Mico and Besnik. Luan, who had been waiting anxiously for this moment, entered with a file, Luan knew that Ilmi Gjura, Agron Verniku and Mico would try to put all the blame on him. He handed over the documents saying that he had removed them on orders from Ilmi Gjura. "Agron Verniku told me that the minister himself gave the orders. My chief, Mico, knew all about the orders. The order was: The people who did this are a subversive group. Investigations must use all means to prove this.... I am a lawyer, and I know that I have violated the law. The party can take whatever measures are necessary."

Chapter 36

Sopot interrogates Ilmi Gjura in the office of the party committee secretary. Ilmi said he did not remember much and suggests that they question the investigator of the case, Luan Sopot replies: "I want to hear it from you. I have already talked to Luan, as well as Astrit Murrizi, Mico and Besnik."

Ilmi was frightened. The delegate had come prepared. Ilmi put all the blame on the inspector. Sopot asked him many questions and finally said: "How can you remain calm when people are in prison for a crime they did not commit, and when they are unjustly interned? This sort of thing is done only by those who consciously go against party directives and the people's interests."

Ilmi had tried to exert pressure on the factory director to send Elizabeth back to the village but the director was stubborn. He had tried at the faculty, through the chief's wife, to prevent Elizabeth's admittance, but Elizabeth fought like a cat, and on orders from the district party committee she was accepted at the University.

There were only two or three people who would defend Ilmi, people who owed him favors. For the first time in his life Ilmi had regrets about his career. He blamed the minister for "putting him in a blind alley, for influencing him in this whole investigation process.... On other occasions the minister had given great importance to

minor incidents. Ilmi knew why: The minister wanted to appear to be an able person, a man who did great things, who exposed groups. He wanted in fact to establish a guarantee and a good reputation in higher quarters."

He regretted having gotten involved in this affair. He went to the office of his subordinate, Konstandin, to try to get a feel for what might be the attitude toward him in the basic organization. Konstandin greeted him coldly.

"The prime minister committed suicide. The press, radio and television reports, as well as the funeral, followed formal etiquette. After the radio and TV announcements the programs returned to their regular broadcasts."

"The discussion in the Politburo in regard to the prime minister is recorded for the party aktivs."

"The former prime minister's wife, party Central Committee member and director of the party school, was arrested. She was arrested for enemy activities, for participating in a counterrevolutionary organization."

"Konstandin was given a new position: chief of Investigations in a district in the south. The minister, Ilmi Gjura, and the party committee secretary participated in announcing the order. The minister had praised Konstandin highly, emphasizing that the department would suffer but that there was a great need for 'a strong hand in the district.'"

Chapter 37

At the basic organization of the Directorate of Internal Affairs Luan made his self-criticism and attacked Mico and Ilmi Gjura "who had intentionally put him on the wrong road using somewhat surprising methods."

Mico had taken a strong stimulant. He was only afraid that he would be expelled from the party and that his children would be shamed. Otherwise he could care less. The children had inherited about a million leks from his father who had sold property and merchandise in the village.

Besnik had not broken under pressure or threats.

Asllan was as frightened as a wet hen. They did not even give him a chance to speak. He was guilty and there was nothing more to say.

The People's Assembly elected a new prime minister who presented the new government appointees. The minister of interior was not on the list. One of the party

Central Committee secretaries was elected to the position.... The former minister of internal affairs was named deputy minister.

The secretary of the party committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was removed from office. Ilmi Gjura was arrested. The director of the Sigurimi was at first transferred, then relieved of his duties. Robert Petroja was demoted to party candidate and removed from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Other changes were made. "The party had started the transfusion of the Ministry of Internal Affairs."

The party Central Committee Plenum expelled the minister of defense, who had been minister of internal affairs for 30 consecutive years, from the Politburo, the Central Committee and the party. He had been replaced in that position by the former minister who killed himself. The plenum's question was answered: Why was it that until now it was the party and not the Sigurimi which had uncovered all the diabolical plots?

Chapter 38

Agron Verniku was extremely worried, above all about being arrested. In fact he continued to work in the new minister's group but didn't know why he was retained. He was merely given a reprimand in the basic organization for falsifying the memorandum on the knives.

Agron tried to avoid being seen with the former minister and was shocked when the minister was handcuffed.

An individual described as the minister's pet tried to avoid paying customs duty when he returned from abroad by saying to the customs agent that "This package is for the minister of internal affairs." The customs official's smile made him tremble.

Chapter 39

Altin tried to avoid Elizabeth and she in turn ignored him. He knew she had regained all her rights: Work, school, back pay. Only her family had not yet returned from internment. Altin regretted that he had doubted her and questioned his right to have doubted her, but he did not dare approach her.... Stopping in the Palace of Culture for cigarettes, Altin saw Elizabeth with her parents and her brother. He felt as though everyone was looking at him, pointing fingers at him. Seeing Mithat Magripi Altin recalled the last time they had met when Mithat told him that Elizabeth would have to deal with Sigurimi the rest of her life: "No, Mithat Magripi, things turned out differently. You stupid and fickle man, you didn't understand a thing; you didn't understand that some day you would have to go to the doors of the factory to ask for work.... Let's see if they greet you as before when you showed off as a Sigurimi officer!"

Altin had followed the drama of his beloved and hoped that such things would never happen again. Mistakes can occur, but committing monstrous crimes was disgraceful. Enver Hoxha had severely criticized the cult of the Sigurimi organization.... It's the people who make the final decisions. People like Mithat Magripi forget this and forget that they must serve the people with honor.

Chapter 40

One morning in June 1982, Astrit Murrizi did not go to the faculty. The party committee of the region had told him that he was to work again at the Ministry of Internal Affairs where the minister had asked for him.

A year earlier he had left the ministry in a totally different atmosphere. A lot had happened since then. A dangerous plot headed by the prime minister and the ministers of internal affairs had been uncovered. The center of the plot was the Ministry of Internal Affairs, precisely the organization whose duty it was to protect the party and the people's government.

Many comrades from the Ministry of Internal Affairs shook Astrit's hand and praised him, even those who would not speak to him before. This annoyed him and he greeted them coldly, not because of false modesty. He did not consider himself a hero, nor persecuted. He was a simple soldier, like all the others. Someone wanted him to meet Edward Skenderas. Edward had been released from prison, had been readmitted into the party and was working in the factory. He wanted to thank Astrit but Astrit responded: "No, I do not want to meet him. I had no power. He should be grateful to the party, to Enver Hoxha.... They saved him."

As he neared Hotel Dajti a car stopped and Besim Lika came out to greet him. Discussing the case of the knives, Astrit remarks that the case of the sheet metal knives was nothing compared to the other knives that the plotters wanted to plunge into the party's back.

Looking at the massive building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Astrit recalled that Enver Hoxha had referred to it as the place where the enemies had built their nest of vipers. "They had plotted systematically for years.... The party would have to work long and hard to destroy the myths about this department, and to destroy the cult of the Sigurimi. Enver Hoxha had always insisted that the Sigurimi personnel were only political workers, party workers, nothing else. What the enemy had done for nearly 20 years in the Ministry of Internal Affairs had to be undone quickly. This was a serious obligation."

Astrit knew that now more than ever before, the party would judge calmly and reasonably. Those who committed a crime would be punished; those who unintentionally made a mistake would be given help to change; others would be put on pension.

At the ministry Astrit greeted the writer who had left the ministry before Astrit. "They are returning. The party is returning her sons to her fold again."

Agron Verniku was no longer at the ministry.... Astrit was reassigned to his previous work in the ministry.... Astrit was extremely happy. For the first time in a year he felt a desire to look under a microscope. He yearned to go back to the work which had interested him all his life.

Tirana, 1982-88

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